



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

**NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

---

Contact: Dennis Feltgen  
301-713-0622 ext 127

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
June 1, 2007

### **NOAA AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE TEAM UP TO EDUCATE BEACHGOERS ON HOW TO BREAK THE GRIP OF THE RIP®**

With the summer vacation season here, NOAA and the National Park Service are alerting beachgoers to the threat of rip currents and how to escape their strong and potentially fatal grip. It is the focus of NOAA's national Rip Current Awareness Week, June 3-9, 2007.

Rip currents are narrow channels of fast-moving water that pull swimmers away from the shore. Panicked swimmers fail trying to counter the current by swimming straight back to shore — putting themselves at risk of drowning because of fatigue. Rip currents account for more than 80 percent of rescues performed by lifeguards, totaling tens of thousands of people in the U.S. every year. An estimated 100 people are killed by rip currents annually.

"Before going into the water, check the rip current forecast, swim on guarded beaches and know how to escape a rip current's grip," said Brig. Gen. David L. Johnson, U.S. Air Force (Ret.), director of NOAA's National Weather Service. "Doing so may just save your life."

Rip currents are prevalent along the East, Gulf, and West coasts in addition to the Great Lakes. Rip current education is critical to every swimmer and especially those who visit the beach infrequently and may be unfamiliar with this leading swimming hazard.

NOAA National Weather Service forecast offices that serve coastal areas issue Surf Zone Forecasts with rip current outlooks when rip currents are a threat. These are available online, through the media and are broadcast over NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards.

"Everyone should learn how to identify rip currents and take the time to assess the surf conditions before diving in," advises Tom Herrington, Ph.D, director of the Stevens – New Jersey Sea Grant Cooperative Extension. "If caught in a rip current, don't fight it! Swim parallel to the shore and back to land at an angle." Sea Grant is NOAA's primary university-based program, located in each coastal state, to promote better understanding, conservation and use of America's coastal resources.

Moving at speeds of up to eight feet per second, rip currents can move faster than an Olympic swimmer and can easily overpower a victim. Ian Crocker, four-time Olympic medalist for the United States Swim Team, holds the men's world record for completing the 100 meter butterfly in 50.40 seconds—a pace of nearly six feet per second. "A rip current is one competitor all swimmers should avoid challenging," said Crocker, who joins NOAA and the NPS in educating the public on rip currents through his participation in public service announcements.

"Every year, more than 75 million visitors come to swim, fish, snorkel, scuba dive, boat and enjoy the wildlife and majestic scenery in the coastal areas of our National Park System. The National Park Service has had a long partnership with NOAA and its National Weather Service to enhance our ability to provide visitors with the latest information on water safety," said Mary Bomar, director of the National Park Service. "We are thrilled to partner with NOAA for this important awareness campaign to bring scientific-based information to the public about the dangers of rips currents and safety measures that will save lives in waterways throughout our parks."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

###

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Rip Current information: <http://www.ripcurrents.noaa.gov>

NOAA Sea Grant: <http://www.seagrants.noaa.gov>

*Break the Grip of the Rip* is a registered trademark of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.